United Nations A/54/890–S/2000/512

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
1 June 2000

Original: English

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session
Agenda item 43
The situation in the Middle East

Security Council
Fifty-fifth year

Letter dated 31 May 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I wish to respond to the letter addressed to you by the Permanent Representative of Lebanon, dated 22 May, concerning the withdrawal of Israeli forces in Lebanon (A/54/880-S/2000/465).

The Government of Israel adopted a decision, on 5 March 2000, to withdraw its forces from Lebanon. That decision was carried out on 24 May, as the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) redeployed to the international border.

It should be emphasized that the IDF completed the withdrawal swiftly and with maximum restraint, despite efforts by terrorists in the area to provoke a confrontation. The only instances in which force was used occurred when lives were at risk, and even then in a manner designed to avoid further casualties. The IDF, in fact, took pains to avoid any actions that might endanger innocent civilians, even as the terrorists cynically sought to use civilians as human shields. The Israeli forces were soon deployed safely on the Israeli side of the international border.

Israel had repeatedly expressed its preference for carrying out the withdrawal in the framework of a peace agreement. However, these efforts were not reciprocated in kind. Therefore, Israel finally undertook to withdraw unilaterally. The withdrawal was completed in full compliance with Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978). It should be recalled that in resolution 425 (1978), the Security Council calls not only for the withdrawal of Israeli forces but also for the restoration of international peace and security and the return of the effective authority of the Government of Lebanon to the area.

Now that the withdrawal has been concluded, we expect that the Government of Lebanon will fulfil its responsibility of ensuring peace and security within its borders. International law prohibits any State from allowing its territory to be a launching pad for terrorist activities. Israel reserves its right to act in self-defence should the need arise.

00-45786 (E) 010600

Prime Minister Ehud Barak made an appeal to the Government of Lebanon following Israel's withdrawal, in a special session of the Knesset held on 25 May 2000, in the northern Israeli city of Kiryat Shemona, where terrorists had rained hundreds of katyusha rockets from Lebanon over the years. "I appeal to the Government and people of Lebanon," Mr. Barak said. "I appeal to you, President Emile Lahoud. Israel extends its hand toward peace out of a vision of a joint future better for the children of both peoples. Let's exploit the moment, let's talk peace."

We call upon our neighbours to seize the momentum and return to the negotiating table so that we can bring peace to the region and security to our common borders.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 43, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Yehuda **Lancry**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative